

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3844

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 04102

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, BE

SUBJECT: LABOR DISPUTES IN PUBLIC SECTOR CONTINUE

REF: BRUSSELS 03880 AND BRUSSELS 03902

SUMMARY. GOVERNMENT" ANNOUNCEMENT OF TWO-MONTH PRICE FREEZE MAY 1 HAS BEEN FOLLOWED BY INCREASED TRADE UNION MILITANCY IN PUBLIC SECTOR. NATION-WIDE STRIKE OF HEALTH WORKERS AND STRIKE OF MUNICIPAL WORKERS IN BRUSSELS MAY 7 CULMINATED IN DEMONSTRATION WHICH REQUIRED INTERVENTION OF GENDARMERIE. TEACHERS UNION BROKE OFF NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT MAY 5 AND HAS SCHEDULED NATIONAL STRIKE MAY 23. STRIKE OF PRISON WORKERS IN FRANCOPHONE AREAS IS ALSO UNDERWAY. THESE SHOWS OF MILITANCY DEMONSTRATE LABOR'S INSISTENCE ON WAGE INCREASES, PRICE- FREEZE OR NO. GOVERNMENT HAS STATED THAT WAGE FREEZE IS NOT CONEMPLATED NOW. END SUMMARY.

1. WORKERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH FIELD STAGED ONE-DAY NATION- WIDE STRIKE MAY 7 TO PROTEST FAILURE OF PRIME MINISTER TO APPROVE REVISION OF SALARY SCALE. UNION
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CLAIMS THIS WAS PROMISED BY HEALTH MINISTER IN RECENT

NEGOTIATIONS BOTH CRISTIAN CSC AND SOCIALIST FGFB PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS PARTICIPATED IN STRIKE UNDER COMMON FRONT. BRUSSELS MUNICIPAL WORKERS LIKEWISE STRUCK THE SAME DAY UNDER CSC-FGFB COMMON FRONT AGREEMENT. DEMAND WAS FOR BENEFITS EQUAL TO THOSE OF MUNICIPAL WORKERS IN LIEGE AND ANTWERP.

2. MORE THAN 3,000 STRIKERS PARTICIPATED IN DEMONSTRATION IN BRUSSELS WHICH WAS SUPPOSED TO END WITH PEACEFUL MARCH THROUGH CENTER OF CITY. BUT AS MARCH ENDED, 200 MILITANTS, PRIMARILY GARBAGE COLLECTORS, ATTEMPTED ENTER AREA BETWEEN PALACE AND PARLIAMENT TO PRESENT A PETITION TO PRIME MINISTER. WHEN GENDARMERIE PREVENTED ACCESS TO THIS AREA, WHICH IS TRADITIONALLY OFF LIMITS TO DEMONSTRATORS, SCUFFLING BROKE OUT WHICH EVENTUALLY REQUIRED GENDARMERIE TO SUMMON REINFORCEMENTS. SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS WERE ARRESTED AND TEN INJURIES RESULTED FROM MELEE BRUNT OF UNION INDIGNATION AT BRUSQUE POLICE ACTION WAS BORNE BY GENDARMERIE, NOT BRUSSELS CITY POLICE, WHO HAD OBSERVED ONE-HOUR SOLIDARITY STRIKE PRIOR TO DEMONSTRATION.

3. ELSEWHERE ON LABOR FRONT, NATION- WIDE STRIKE OF SOCIALIST FGFB PRISON WORKERS ENDED THIRD DAY WITH GENDARMERIE MAINTAINING PRISON SECURITY. FOUR CONVICTS WHO ESCAPED DURING FIRST DAY WERE RECAPTURED. TEACHERS UNIONS, WITH CSC AND FGFB AFFILIATES ACTING JOINTLY, BROKE OFF LONG-DRAWN-OUT NEGOTIATIONS WITH MINEDUCATION ON WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS. THEY HAVE SCHEDULED NATIONWIDE STRIKE FOR MAY 23.

4. COMMENT: IF GOVERNMENT HOPED THAT IS HASTY ACTION OF APRIL 30 PUTTING IN A TWO-MONTH PRICE FREEZE WOULD ABATE LABOR AGITATION FOR WAGE INCREASES, THE WEEK'S EVENTS HAVE DISABUSED IT. SOCIALIST PARTY AND FGFB HAVE DENOUNCED PRICE FREEZE AND SOUNDED MILITANT NOTE ON LABOR FRONT. CHRISTIAN LABOR FEDERATION, CSC, WHICH SUPPORTS GOVERNMENT, HAS FELT COMPELLED TO GO ALONG WITH ITS MILITANT RIVAL. WITH TRADE-UNION PREFERENCE ELECTIONS UNDER WAY IN BELGIAN FACTORIES AND OFFICES, GSC IS IN NO POSITION TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF BELGIUM'S PROBLEM OF GETTING SOARING WAGES AND PRICES UNDER CONTROL. FIRESTONE

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